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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - SILAJDZIC SEEKS CONTROL OF FEDERATION TV

REF: A. SARAJEVO 2406

- [1](#)B. SARAJEVO 2370
- [1](#)C. SARAJEVO 2253
- [1](#)D. SARAJEVO 131

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Political and media contacts allege that Bosniak nationalist parties are conspiring to seek control over the editorial policies of public television. An upcoming vote in Parliament to replace the Bosniak board member for Bosnia-Herzegovina Radio and Television (BHRT) will provide the first opportunity for a Party for Democratic Action (SDA) faction led by Bakir Izetbegovic and Party for BiH (SBiH) to promote their candidate. A draft public broadcasting reform law in the Federation Parliament may provide an opportunity to punish Federation Television (FTV) for reporting perceived to be critical to Bosniak national interests. These events could lead to the stifling of news reporting critical of Bosniak national parties and their politics, provide a challenge to the freedom of the media and expose a further weakening of SDA President Sulejman Tihic's control of his party. End Summary.

Election for BHRT Bosniak Board Member

[1](#)2. (SBU) The state Parliament will soon select a new candidate for the Bosnia-Herzegovina Radio and Television BHRT) managing board following the recent expiration of the term of Bosniak member Plamenko Custovic. The election is slated to be on the agenda of the next Parliamentary session, which has not yet been scheduled. We were told by political and media contacts that an SDA faction led by Bakir Izetbegovic supports the candidacy of Sacir Filandra, head of the Preporod Muslim Cultural Society. Filandra is a self-described independent unaffiliated with any party. Although Filandra is not known for his nationalist views we are concerned that he has been identified by SBiH and the Izetbegovic wing of SDA because of his susceptibility to political pressure. SDA President Sulejman Tihic reportedly supports a different candidate, Ahmed Zilic, who many media professionals view as an independent and professional alternative. BHT news programs have a reputation for objective reporting and have not shied away from criticizing Bosnian political leaders, including for their failure to meet the requirements to initial a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. We are told that Izetbegovic has cut a deal with SBiH to support Filandra in order to protect Bosniak national interests. The outgoing

Bosniak board member was reported to oppose political interference in the content of state television reporting. Several contacts expressed concern that a board member, loyal to Izetbegovic and his SDA faction, would work with nationalist Serb and Croat counterparts on the managing board to stop reporting critical to political leaders.

Nationalist Challenge to FTV Leadership

¶3. (SBU) Several political and press sources have expressed concern to us that the Bakir Izetbegovic's SDA faction also agreed to work with SBiH to remove FTV senior leadership. FTV is known for its objective broadcasts, including investigative reports on corruption, war crimes, and organized crime. FTV news broadcasts also regularly challenge the nationalist rhetoric of Bosnian politicians from all ethnic groups and address controversial issues, such as the ineffective response of the Islamic Community to the rise of Wahhabism in Bosnia. FTV's flagship news magazine 60 Minutes has been particularly critical of the entity and state political leaders and ministers. FTV political editor-in-chief Bakir Hadziomerovic (a Bosniak) has broadcast sharp criticism of Silajdzic, and FTV recently aired a detailed expose of alleged misuse of position by SBiH Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj. FTV also publicly questioned the placement of several relatives of Izetbegovic and Federation Prime Minister Nedžad Brankovic in management positions at BiH Telecom. Serb board member Nikola Deretic is also exerting pressure on the board where he recently asked for the replacement of Hadziomerovic.

¶4. (SBU) SBiH has made no secret of its hostility to FTV or its editorial policies. SBiH Federation MPs used the opportunity presented by a debate in the Federation

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Parliament on an audit of FTV to openly attack FTV officials. Several SBiH MPs threatened to remove FTV officials, including Hadziomerovic. The attacks did not dissuade Hadziomerovic from airing news segments critical of nationalist Bosniak politics, both SBiH and SDA, however. He recently broadcast footage documenting the exhumation of a grave of Sarajevo Serbs killed by a Bosniak military unit in ¶1993. The footage was graphic and was an implicit challenge to Bosniak claims that no Sarajevo Serbs were victimized during the 1992-1995 wars. (Note: Three weeks ago during the 15th anniversary of SDA's creation of the 10th Mountain Brigade, an SDA cantonal politician recommended paying respects to the late Brigade commander Musan Topalovic a.k.a. Caco, who was killed during the war. Hadziomerovic's reporting reminded the public that Caco and his men were responsible for a 1993 massacre of approximately 42 non-Bosniaks as well as of nine Bosniak, Serb, and Croat soldiers and police sent to arrest Caco. End Note.) We were told that Hadziomerovic was been put under police protection following the broadcast.

Public Broadcasting Reform

¶5. (SBU) One of the conditions for Bosnia to initial a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU is public broadcasting reform. A draft Federation Law on Public Broadcasting has been held up in the Federation Parliament over perceived threats to the national interests of Croats, but we are told those concerns are being resolved. Once adopted, the law would allow the Federation Parliament to name a new FTV steering board, providing SBiH and its SDA allies with an opening to replace the current FTV leadership with more pliable steering board members and senior editorial staff. (Note: The current steering board was installed by the HighRep. End Note) It is not clear how soon the PBS law issue will be resolved in the Federation, given the preoccupation among political leaders with the crisis over the HighRep's October 19 measures, but we are told that a vote could come

by the end of the year.

Comment

16. (SBU) If accurate, SDA and SBiH attempts to control public broadcasting are reminiscent of their recent jockeying to control two large and profitable public companies BiH Telecom and Elektroprivreda (Ref C). If Bakir Izetbegovic's SDA faction succeeds with SBiH's help in gaining the election of their preferred BHRT board candidate, it will be another blow to the authority of SDA President Tihic and his ability to control the rank and file of his party. Perhaps more disturbing is the alleged Bosniak nationalist effort to take control of FTV. This combined with Dodik's successful silencing of opposition in RS media and January boycott of BHRT (Ref D) would deprive Bosnian citizens of objective television news reporting. Several contacts from the Bosnian media are concerned that these actions signal a return to the immediate post-Dayton situation in which almost all entity media outlets were under nationalist control. This would solidify control by nationalist parties in their respective entities and provide cover for the misuse of the privatization process by corrupt politicians, not to mention to reverse significant USG efforts to promote the freedom of the media.

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